

TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

- Topic: S. Mark Heim's *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*
- Convener: Anthony Keaty, St. John's Seminary
- Moderator: Jane E. Linahan, St. Francis Seminary
- Presenters: Cara Anthony, University of St. Thomas
Anthony Keaty, St. John's Seminary
- Respondent: S. Mark Heim, Andover Newton Theological School

Cara Anthony began by presenting a brief overview of Mark Heim's book. In his book, Heim challenges the prevailing assumption, made by both exclusivists and inclusivists alike, that there is only one religious goal for all people. In support of his thesis, Heim notes that in Dante's *Divine Comedy* the inhabitants of heaven rejoice in their own distinct form of happiness. Indeed, the poet Virgil enjoys the afterlife that he and other virtuous pagans hoped would await them.

Members of other religions, Heim suggests, pursue communion with God in some dimension of God's triune life. Heim identifies three such dimensions to God's triune life. The first dimension is a somewhat impersonal unity in the triune God, just as there is an impersonal, organic dimension to a human person. This impersonal dimension of God's unity is evidently pursued in religions like Taoism and Buddhism. The second dimension of God's triune life is that dimension in which God is a personal agent. As a personal agent, God makes covenants, commands, punishes, loves, and redeems. Judaism and Islam, as well as Christianity, pursue communion with God in this second dimension of God's life. The third dimension of Trinitarian life is the mutual indwelling of persons. Christianity seeks communion with God in this most profound dimension of God's life, the mutual indwelling of persons. Thus, while all religions pursue communion with the triune God, they pursue communion with different dimensions of God's triune life.

Cara Anthony concluded her paper by raising three questions. Can we really speak of an impersonal dimension in the triune life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Can we make comparisons between the religious experience found in different religions? Is it possible to relate to one dimension of God's life without relating to all dimensions in God's life?

Anthony Keaty wondered to what extent Heim, in making the doctrine of the trinity the framework for understanding religious pluralism, has not altered significantly the doctrine of the trinity. In the social doctrine of the trinity that Heim employs to develop his framework for religious pluralism, what is significant in the distinction of divine persons is the reality of the personal distinctiveness itself. In the doctrine of the trinity, though, we are taught and profess, not just that there is a real distinction in God, but that the distinctions involve generation, or Son/Logos, and procession, or Holy Spirit, from source or principle, Father. With respect to the doctrine of the trinity, we confess not just real distinction in God but real distinction according to a certain order. By reducing the distinction of Father, Son/Logos, and

Holy Spirit simply to the real distinction of divine persons, has not Heim introduced an important change in the doctrine of the trinity?

In response to Cara Anthony's three questions, Heim reaffirmed his view that the personal does not necessarily exclude the impersonal. Divine theophanies in Scripture sometimes occur through impersonal media. Furthermore, Heim noted that he is less concerned to draw attention to similarities in religious experience among the various religions but to their real differences. As far as relating to only one dimension in God, Heim observed that possibly in the end all will be united in the worship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is possible, though, that all will in the end find the dimension of God pursued during life. In response to Keaty's question, Heim stated that in his discussion of the real distinction of divine persons, he presupposed that the divine persons were distinguished as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For the purposes of his study of religious pluralism, though, Heim focused on the more general feature of distinction, itself.

Many good questions were raised in the discussion that followed Heim's response. One questioner suggested that "preconscious awareness" might be a better way to express the first dimension of God's triune life than the term "impersonal." Heim agreed that there was merit to the suggestion. In response to a concern that our own subjective bias impedes our understanding of different religions, Heim responded that the aim of comparative religion is to overcome such bias. Finally, the reality of our limited knowledge of God was raised. Should we not be cautious about making claims about the absolute and about the end? Heim answered that he himself is agnostic about whether diverse religions ultimately enjoy diverse ends. He simply wants to uphold this as a possibility.

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